

## **2001 Annual Report Executive Summary**

### **Southwest Georgia United EZ (formerly Crisp Dooly EC)**

#### **Prior Year Highlights:**

- 1999 Empowerment Zone status approved, All Enterprise Community funding obligated, St. Paul/Gillespie Selden Learning Center broke ground, Southwest Georgia Business Development Center construction begun, Significant staff changes;
- 2000 Awarded the first funding from the Empowerment Zone grant to local organizations, Unadilla Primary Health Care Clinic opened, Dooly Crisp Unified Transit System opened, Received a \$256,000 Rural Community Development Initiative grant, Empowerment Zone governments and organizations received over \$1.9 million in grants and loans from various sources, Completed a full update of EC and EZ benchmarks, Began work on personnel policies, Filled four staff positions and added one new position.

**Year 2001 Highlights:** The year 2001 saw the completion of some of the first Empowerment Zone projects. The community continued to develop skills and seek resources to implement its strategic plans. The corporation continued to mature and increase its professionalism through the leadership of the Board of Directors.

The following items demonstrate the accomplishments of the Empowerment Zone during 2001:

- Construction was completed on the St. Paul/Gillespie Selden Learning Center. The facility held its ribbon cutting on August 28 and began operations before the end of 2001. The Crisp County Board of Commissioners, the Empowerment Zone, the State of Georgia, USDA, the St. Paul/Gillespie-Selden Rural Life Center, and St. Paul Presbyterian Church provided funding for construction of the childcare center. The Center plans to offer childcare during extended hours to meet the needs of working parents.
- The Empowerment Zone received keys to the Southwest Georgia Business Development Center on September 21. The Empowerment Zone will operate this 50,000 square foot business incubation facility on behalf of the owner, the Crisp-Dooly Joint Development Authority. The Empowerment Zone moved into the building as an anchor tenant on October 16. Mr. Wayne Foster, the Business Development Center Manager, and Ms. Tricia Easom, the Empowerment Zone Operations Manager, are planning a grand opening celebration for March, 2002.
- Community members, including Empowerment Zone Board members, established AgAmerica Empowerment Incorporated to provide support for farmers and agribusinesses. The Empowerment Zone provided approximately \$450,000 in initial funding. AgAmerica began by establishing a revolving loan fund for irrigation.
- The Board of Directors of the Crisp-Dooly Joint Development Authority authorized the Cordele/Crisp Industrial Development Council and the Dooly County Economic Development Council to seek funds on behalf of the Joint Development Authority to develop a Regional Industrial Park. USDA awarded the Joint Development Authority a \$135,000 Rural Business Opportunity Grant (RBOG) to begin the planning process.
- The Empowerment Zone Board awarded approximately \$470,000 in EZ funds to sixteen community organizations for educational projects, youth projects, cultural projects, and medical projects.

- The community received approximately \$4 million in other new grant and loan funds from a variety of sources. Organizations and awards included a \$2.5 million Department of Education 21st Century Learning Center grant to the Crisp County School System; over \$1,000,000 in grants and loans from USDA to local governments, colleges and nonprofit organizations; and a \$150,000 Rural Housing and Economic Development grant from the Department of Housing and Urban Development.

- The Crisp/Dooly Citizens for Better Housing continued to develop a housing initiative in the Empowerment Zone with support from Crisp Area Habitat for Humanity, USDA, the Empowerment Zone, the Cordele Housing Authority, the Vienna Housing Authority, the University of Georgia, Habitat for Humanity International, local businesses, and other community members. Crisp Area Habitat for Humanity identified between 125 and 150 houses in Crisp County that need to be demolished and replaced.

- Dooly County Chamber of Commerce operated a leadership program for the first time. The program was successful, and the members of the leadership class began planning for the next group to attend. Crisp County Chamber of Commerce had held leadership classes in prior years and began planning to hold adult and youth leadership training in 2002. Middle Flint Barrier Busters, a local nonprofit serving handicapped residents in the southwest Georgia area, held "The Balanced Leader," a community leadership course sponsored by the University of Georgia School of Education

- The Empowerment Zone Board approved a review and update of the Benchmarks, a proposal review process for grant requests, a personnel policies manual for the staff, and a compensation plan.